

TARIFF ACTION MEMORANDUM

File No.: TA347-13

Date: August 16, 2021

Date Filed: July 6, 2021

45-Day Statutory Deadline: August 20, 2021

Utility: Golden Valley Electric Association, Inc.

Description: Office Hours change and Payment Options

Synopsis of Filing:

Golden Valley Electric Association, Inc. submits changes to its main location office hours and include alternative payment options.

Tariff Recommendation:

The Commission should approve Tariff Sheet No. 6.1, filed July 6, 2021, by Golden Valley Electric Association, Inc. with TA347-13, as shown on the attached side-by-side tariff sheet (Appendix 1). The effective date of the tariff sheet should be August 20, 2021.

Reason(s) for the above-indicated recommendation: See attached memorandum.

Signed: Steven Jones
Steven Jones

Title: Utility Tariff Analyst

Commission decision regarding this recommendation:

	<u>Date (if different from 8/16/2021)</u>	<u>I CONCUR</u>	<u>I DO NOT CONCUR</u>	<u>I WILL WRITE A DISSENTING STATEMENT*</u>
Pickett		<u>RMP</u>		
Kurber		<u>KKT</u>		
Scott		<u>AGS</u>		
Sullivan		<u>DS</u>		
Wilson	<u>8/17/2021</u>	<u>JWW</u>		

*If this column is initialed, Staff will contact the Commissioner for the statement; otherwise, the dissent will simply be noted at the close of the By Direction letter or order.

STATE OF ALASKA
The Regulatory Commission of Alaska
701 West 8th Ave., Suite 300
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-3469

M E M O R A N D U M

To: Robert M. Pickett, Chairman
Keith Kurber II
Antony Scott
Daniel A. Sullivan
Janis W. Wilson

Date: August 16, 2021

From: Steven Jones, Utility Tariff Analyst

Subject: TA347-13, Golden Valley Electric Association, Inc.
Office Hours change and Payment Options

STATEMENT OF CASE

Golden Valley Electric Association, Inc. (GVEA) submits changes to its main location office hours and include alternative payment options.

RECOMMENDATION

The Commission should approve Tariff Sheet No. 6.1, filed July 6, 2021, by GVEA with TA347-13, as shown on the attached side-by-side tariff sheet (Appendix 1). The effective date of the tariff sheet should be August 20, 2021.

BACKGROUND

On May 4, 2018, GVEA filed TA313-13, to revise its tariff regarding office locations, business hours, and telephone numbers for reporting emergency conditions/outages. In that filing, GVEA proposed a new section (Section 2.04 on original Tariff Sheet 6.1). This section provided the physical office locations in Fairbanks, Nenana and Delta Junction, as well as GVEA's business hours of 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, except holidays. GVEA also provided an emergency/outage telephone number, a toll free telephone number, its email address and website. This was Rule 2 of GVEA's extensive cooperative-wide process to update and modernize its tariff governing electric operations.¹ On June 11, 2018, the Commission issued Letter Order No. L1800254 approving the tariff sheets filed in TA313-13.

On April 9, 2020, Governor Michael J. Dunleavy signed Senate Bill 241 in response to the ongoing COVID-19 public health disaster emergency declared by the Governor on March 2020. On May 1, 2020, the Commission issued Order No. U-20-015(1) permitting utilities to deviate from their tariffs under AS 42.05.711(d). Among other subjects, SB 241

¹ See tariff advice letter for TA313-4, dated May 4, 2018. Pages 1-3.

prohibited disconnection of residential utility service for nonpayment for those experiencing COVID-19 related financial hardship. It did not address what additional actions a public utility may take to provide relief to customers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.² On May 27, 2020, GVEA notified the Commission that in conjunction with the Governor's "Reopening Alaska Responsibly Plan," GVEA was opening its office with the hours of 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. The purpose of the temporary change in lobby hours was to allow GVEA staff additional time to ensure the lobby and workstations were in compliance with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the Alaska Department of Health guidelines in response to COVID-19.³ On November 10, 2020, GVEA filed an informational filing in Compliance with Order U-20-015(1), in GVEA notified the Commission of the resumption of disconnection procedures. GVEA stated that it had begun to message the pending resumption of disconnection procedures through traditional and social media, postcards sent to affected members, GVEA's website and blog, signage in the lobbies, bill messaging, Ruralite magazine, and phone hold messaging.⁴

With TA347-13, GVEA proposes to revise its office hours at its main location. In addition, GVEA proposes to include language regarding payment options. The Commission issued a public notice for TA347-13 on July 9, 2021, with comments requested by August 9, 2021.⁵ No comments for TA347-13 were received.

ANALYSIS

Office Hours (Tariff Sheet No. 6.1)

With TA347-13, GVEA proposes to update its regular business hours, Monday through Friday, excluding company holidays. Specifically, GVEA proposes that the Fairbanks office (its main office) transition its office hours from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm to 8:30 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday, except holidays. GVEA states that this change does not pertain to GVEA's business hours as GVEA personnel will still staff offices from the hours of 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. This change affects the time where customers can interact live with GVEA staff via in person and telephone. GVEA states that this administrative change aligns all of GVEA's operations under a single and consistent standard, while providing ancillary benefits to GVEA and its customers.⁶

Staff sent a number of questions to GVEA regarding its proposal. GVEA states that during the COVID-19 pandemic, GVEA closed its customer service lobbies and redirected its members to utilize alternative means to conduct business. GVEA notes that as it transitions post-pandemic, a change to office hours (at its main location) will help ensure all GVEA office locations have consistent hours for customer accessibility. GVEA asserts

² See U-20-015(1), Order Permitting Deviations from Tariff Under AS 42.05.711(d). Page 1.

³ See TR2003461, dated May 27, 2020, General Correspondence from GVEA to the Commission.

⁴ See TR2006405 Informational Filing – Compliance with Order U-20-015(1) Permitting Limited and Temporary Deviations from Operating Tariff.

⁵ See 3 AAC 48.280, *Notice and Effective Date*. The notice was published in the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner on November 14, 2020. See Affidavit of Publication, received November 19, 2020.

⁶ See L1800254, dated June 1, 2018.

the change in lobby hours at these locations has provided benefits to both GVEA staff and customers. In addition to reducing overtime, GVEA believes that there are additional benefits to staff and its customer base from a shift in office hours.⁷

Reduction in overtime

GVEA anticipates that this change in office hours will provide financial savings by reducing overtime hours. GVEA indicated overtime is incurred by assisting customers in the phone queues and members in the lobby, who contacted or entered GVEA's facility before closing at 5:00 pm. GVEA states that has incurred an average yearly overtime expense of \$9,631.83⁸ since the year 2018,⁹ with an average of 149.88 hours.¹⁰ GVEA states it wishes to note that the numbers pertaining to overtime costs and hours reflect the impacts of COVID-19 as GVEA's lobbies, irrespective of location, were closed to the public for a majority of 2020 and part of 2021. These closures significantly reduced the overtime values. GVEA's lobbies did not reopen to the public until April 26, 2021. GVEA provided the average calls per hour it receives during the day, which shows a marginal increase during the latter times of the day.¹¹

Consistency in staffing hours

GVEA states that over two years ago, its satellite offices transitioned to the office hours of 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. GVEA states it did not receive any complaints regarding the shortened office hours at the satellite offices with GVEA being proactive in providing advanced notice to customers of the shortened office hours.¹² At that time, GVEA's main office maintained the hours of 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. GVEA states that as it transitions to normal business operations in a post-pandemic environment, a change to office hours will help ensure that all of its office locations have consistent hours for Member accessibility. This change would also allow GVEA staff across the company to take advantage of group training and attend department-wide and company-wide meetings and functions. Additionally, GVEA has experienced significant turnover in some of its operations, and this extra hour will provide opportunities for public-facing staff to meet with their respective supervisors and fine-tune day-to-day operations.¹³

Alternative Payment Methods

GVEA stated that during the COVID-19 pandemic, it closed all its member service lobbies to the public and promoted the alternative ways its customers could make payments or otherwise conduct business. These methods include the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) System, E-Bill system, Member Portal, Mobile Application, and a Payment Drop

⁷ See Tariff Filing for TA347-13, dated July 6, 2021. Page 2 of 4.

⁸ Overtime dollars per year: \$16,830.52 [2018] + \$13,489.83 [2019] + \$4,609.47 [2020] + \$3,597.5 [2021] = \$38,527.32. This figure divided by 4 gives an average of \$9,631.83 per year.

⁹ See TR2104213, Response to Staff Questions.

¹⁰ Overtime hours per year: 256.5 [2018] + 213.5 [2019] + 71.5 [2020] + 58 [2021] = 599.50. This figure divided by 4 gives an average of 149.88 hours per year.

¹¹ See TR2104213, Response to Staff Questions. Page 3 of 4.

¹² *Ibid*, Page 2 of 4.

¹³ See Tariff Filing for TA347-13, dated July 6, 2021. Page 2 of 4.

Box in both Fairbanks and Delta. These changes greatly increased Members' usage of electronic communication and payment means compared to prior years. As restrictions lessened, GVEA reopened some of its services to the public, while leaving others on a by-appointment basis, depending on the length and complexity of the interaction. GVEA proposes to list these alternative contact methods specifically in its tariff.¹⁴

In addition, GVEA indicates that its members can report an emergency condition and/or outage, by using GVEA's Interactive Voice Response to contact Dispatch at any time by dialing 907-452-1151 or 1-800-770-4832. Members whose electric service is disconnected and wish to be reconnected after hours will still be able to be reconnected through Dispatch anytime and Member Services will still be able to assist Dispatch with these members until 5:00 pm. Members can also communicate with GVEA staff via electronic mail or social media any time. Additionally, members can pay at any one of GVEA's four Payment Kiosks in Fairbanks, Delta Junction, Healy, and Nenana.¹⁵

Staff reviewed the regulations pertaining to electric utilities. 3 AAC 52.405(b) provides, in relevant part, that a utility shall maintain business office hours on a regular schedule to include at least part of each weekday, except holidays, during the time period from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. Staff reviewed Commission records for other filings regarding the reduction in office hours and providing alternative payment methods. Staff notes that on December 13, 2018, ENSTAR filed TA308-4 seeking to update its customer lobby hours at its office location. With this filing, ENSTAR proposed to update its regular business hours that its lobbies will be open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and its phone center and other services will be open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. In addition, ENSTAR proposed adding that the listed offices have 24-hour payment kiosks. ENSTAR provided the call rate, overtime hours estimated to be saved, and alternative payment methods.¹⁶ On January 18, 2019, the Commission issued Letter Order No. L1900049 approving the tariff sheets filed with TA308-4.

Staff notes that GVEA's proposal does not change its non-face-to-face hours, and alternative payment methods are provided to conduct business and make payments beyond staffed location hours. Staff reviewed the proposed tariff sheet and believes that the revision in office hours is consistent with 3 AAC 52.405(b), benefits both staff and customer base by reducing overtime which could potentially decrease costs to customers, and provides consistency. Staff also believes that GVEA's proposal is similar to the proposal made by ENSTAR in TA308-4. Therefore, Staff recommends that the Commission approve Tariff Sheet No. 6.1.

¹⁴ See Tariff Filing for TA347-13, dated July 6, 2021. Page 2 of 4.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ See TR2104213, Response to Staff Questions. Page 3 of 4.

CONCLUSION

With TA347-13, GVEA submits changes to its main location office hours and includes alternative payment options. Staff has reviewed the information provided, and believes the tariff sheet is correct. Therefore, Staff recommends the Commission approve Tariff Sheet No. 6.1, filed July 6, 2021 by GVEA with TA347-13. The effective date of the tariff sheet should be August 20, 2021.

Signature: Keith Kurber II
Keith Kurber II (Aug 16, 2021 12:57 AKDT)

Email: keith.kurber@alaska.gov

Signature: AS

Email: antony.scott@alaska.gov

Signature: Daniel Sullivan
Daniel Sullivan (Aug 17, 2021 06:28 AKDT)

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Signature: Janis W. Wilson
Janis W. Wilson (Aug 17, 2021 09:42 AKDT)

Email: janis.wilson@alaska.gov

RCA No. 13 Original Sheet No. 6.1
Canceling: _____ Sheet No. _____

RECEIVED
MAY 04 2018

STATE OF ALASKA
REGULATORY COMMISSION OF ALASKA

GOLDEN VALLEY ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION, INC.

RULES AND REGULATIONS

Rule 2. General (continued)

2.04 Means of Contacting the Association

The Association's main office is located at 758 Illinois Street, Fairbanks, Alaska, 99701. The Association also has two district offices at the following locations:

<u>Nenana</u>	<u>Delta Junction</u>
7259 Parks Highway (Mile 303.5)	1681 Richardson Highway
Nenana, Alaska 99760	Delta Junction, Alaska 99737

The Association's business hours are Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., except holidays. Members will be notified in advance, when possible, of all office closures. Notice of office closures will be posted at the Association's main and/or district offices as well as on the Association's website.

Members may apply for Electric Service, make payments, inquire about conditions of service, enter into Deferred Payment Agreements, receive explanations of their bills, and make general inquiries regarding the Association at these locations.

To report an emergency condition and/or an outage, update contact information, and/or obtain general account information, Members may contact the Association by telephone at (907) 452-1151 or toll free at 1-800 770-4832.

Members may also contact the Association via electronic mail at info@gvea.com or via its website www.gvea.com.

Tariff Advice No. TA313-13 Effective: **June 18, 2018**

Issued by: Golden Valley Electric Association, Inc.

By: Cory R. Borgeson Title: President & CEO

RCA No. 13 First Revision Sheet No. 6.1
Canceling: Original Sheet No. 6.1



GOLDEN VALLEY ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION, INC.

RULES AND REGULATIONS

Rule 2. General (continued)

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Members may also contact the Association via electronic mail at info@gvea.com or via its website at www.gvea.com

Members can utilize the Association's Interactive Voice Response System, E-Bill system, Member Portal or Mobile Application to make a payment at any time. Payment kiosks are also available at the following locations and hours:

Fairbanks: 758 Illinois Street - 6:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m., seven days a week
Delta Junction: 1681 Richardson Highway - 24 hours, seven days a week
Healy: 248 5 George Parks Highway - 7:00 a.m. - 10:00 p.m., Monday – Saturday and 8:00 a.m. - 10:00 p.m. Sunday
Nenana: 807 A Street - 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Monday through Saturday

Tariff Advice No. TA347-13 Effective:

Issued by: Golden Valley Electric Association, Inc.

By: John J. Burns Title: President & CEO